

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7911

INFO: RUFHJA/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1262

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUDAPEST 0482

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PGOV, HU, US, VT

SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS; GOH RELATIONS WITH VATICAN

ROME FOR AMBASSADOR LODGE

1. SUMMARY: CHARGE CALLED FEBRUARY 11 ON IMRE MIKLOS, MINISTER-CHAIRMAN, STATE OFFICE FOR CHURCH AFFAIRS, IN HIS OFFICE OPPOSITE FRENCH EMBASSY. HE WAS ACCCOMPANIED BY PAO WHO ACTED AS INTERPRETER. DURING CONVERSATION LASTING ONE HOUR AND TWENTY MINUTES, FOLLOWING SUBJECTS WERE DISCUSSED: (A) RELATIONS BETWEEN HUNGARIAN AND AMERICAN CHURCHES; (B) GOH-VATICAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS; (C) RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN HUNGARY; AND (D) VATICAN AND CROWN OF ST. STEPHEN.
END SUMMARY.

2. RELATIONS BETWEEN HUNGARIAN AND AMERICAN CHURCHES:

AFTER EXCHANGE OF PLEASANTRIES, MIKLOS WELCOMED

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CHARGE'S REMARKS THAT BOTH LEKAI AND KALDY VISITS TO U.S. HAD BEEN USEFUL AND WELCOME AS EVIDENCE OF GOH INTENTION TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS IN RELIGIOUS SPHERE AS WELL. HE SAID GOH CERTAINLY DID NOT OPPOSE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE NATURAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HUNGARIAN CHURCH LEADERS AND THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES. HE POINTED OUT THAT THESE TWO HIGH-LEVEL VISITS HAD BY NO

MEANS BEEN ONLY ONES TO OCCUR BETWEEN HUNGARY AND U.S. AND CITED A NUMBER OF OTHER EXAMPLES, INCLUDING 1974 VISITS OF BISHOPS BARTHA AND CSERHATI, AND VISIT OF SOME JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS. HE ALSO MENTIONED THAT RECENTLY HE HAD A VISIT FROM AN AMERICAN PRIEST, BROUGHT TO HIM BY CARDINAL LEKAI, FOR PURPOSE OF SOUNDING OUT GOH ON POSSIBILITY OF A VISIT TO HUNGARY THIS YEAR BY AN AMERICAN BISHOP OR CARDINAL. MIKLOS SAID SUCH A VISIT WOULD BE WELCOME.

IN GENERAL, MIKLOS SAID GOH APPRECIATED VALUE OF BILATERAL CONTACTS BETWEEN HUNGARIAN AND U.S. CHURCHES, AND AGREED THAT THEY WERE A USEFUL VEHICLE FOR IMPROVEMENT OF OVERALL RELATIONS.

3. GOH-VATICAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS:

MIKLOS EVINCED CONSIDERABLE CAUTION IN CHOOSING HIS WORDS ON THIS SUBJECT. HE SAID QUESTION OF ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN HUNGARY AND VATICAN HAD COME UP ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS IN HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH VATICAN REPRESENTATIVES ARCHBISHOPS CASAROLI AND POGGI. ACTUALLY, GOH-VATICAN RELATIONS ARE WORKING WELL WITHIN PRESENT "INFORMAL RELATIONSHIP" (PERIODIC VISITS TO HUNGARY BY CASAROLI AND POGGI), BEST PROOF BEING NUMBER OF PROBLEMS RESOLVED DURING PAST FEW YEARS. IN PRINCIPLE, GOH DOES NOT OPPOSE FORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH VATICAN BUT NEITHER IS IT URGING THEM; AT THE MOMENT "CONDITIONS ARE NOT YET RIPE FOR IT". MIKLOS WAS RATHER

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VAGUE ABOUT WHAT THESE "UNRIPE CONDITIONS" ARE BUT HE EMPHASIZED STRONGLY THAT THERE IS LITTLE PRESSURE ON GOH SIDE TO PROCEED, AS LONG AS PRESENT RELATIONSHIP IS WORKING AS WELL AS IT DOES.

MIKLOS ADDED THAT ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH VATICAN DID NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT THINGS WOULD BE BETTER IN ACTUAL PRACTICE. HE CITED EXAMPLE OF YUGOSLAVIA WHERE THERE HAVE BEEN FORMAL TIES FOR A LONG TIME AND YET THERE ARE MANY PRIESTS IN JAIL. THERE IS NOT A SINGLE PRIEST IN JAIL IN HUNGARY, MIKLOS DECLARED. SIMILARLY IN POLAND, HE CONTINUED, TIES ARE MORE STRUCTURED THAN IN HUNGARY ALTHOUGH NOT FORMALIZED; YET THERE ARE MAJOR CHURCH-STATE PROBLEMS THERE TOO. ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN, HE OPINED, DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN END OF CHURCH-STATE DIFFICULTIES.

4. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

MIKLOS WAS RATHER EXPANSIVE ON THIS SUBJECT. HE SAID THAT AS FAR AS GOH IS CONCERNED PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IS SOLVED. HE ADMITTED EXISTENCE OF SOME DIFFICULTIES IN THIS AREA BUT SAID SOME PROBLEMS WOULD ALWAYS EXIST, BUT HE DID NOT CONSIDER THEM TO BE SERIOUS.

ACCORDING TO MIKLOS BETWEEN 80,000 AND 100,000 CHILDREN ARE ENROLLED IN CATECHISM CLASSES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND A ROUGHLY SIMILAR NUMBER GO TO SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES IN PARISH CHURCHES. (EACH CHURCH CAN HAVE FOUR GROUPS OF 40 STUDENTS: TWO FOR CHILDREN UNDER AGE OF 10 AND TWO FOR OLDER ONES.) AS AN ASIDE, HE REMARKED THAT IN SOME BIG CITY CHURCHES 160 PLACES MAY NOT BE ENOUGH TO SATISFY DEMAND, BUT HE DID NOT SEEM EAGER TO DWELL ON SUBJECT.

MIKLOS POINTED OUT THAT IT IS TEMPTING FOR PRIESTS
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TO "TAKE EASY WAY OUT" BY BLAMING COMMUNIST FOR LACK OF INTEREST BY CHILDREN IN CATECHISM CLASSES. BUT IN FACT THERE ARE MANY OTHER REASONS, REFLECTED WORLDWIDE, FOR DECREASING INTEREST IN ORGANIZED RELIGION. ONE OF THEM IS INCREASING SECULARIZATION OF LIFE, HIGHLY VISIBLE, FOR EXAMPLE, IN WESTERN COUNTRIES. HE SAID NUMBER OF CHILDREN TAKING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN HUNGARY IS ROUGHLY 11 PERCENT OF TOTAL POPULATION IN THAT AGE GROUP AND IS ABOUT EQUIVALENT TO WHAT CHURCHES ESTIMATE TO BE PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WHO ACTUALLY PRACTICE FAITH. HE FELT IT WAS UNREASONABLE OF CHURCH TO EXPECT THAT PROPORTION OF CHILDREN INTERESTS IN RELIGION SHOULD BE HIGHER THAN THAT OF ADULTS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUDAPEST 0482

E.O. 11652: GDS

SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS: GOH RELATIONS WITH VATICAN

MIKLOS WENT ON TO SAY THAT CHURCH, OR AT LEAST SOME OF THE CLERGY, STILL HAS TO GET ACCUSTOMED TO NEW SYSTEM IN HUNGARY. AFTER ALL, BEFORE WWII WAR ALL INSTRUMENTS OF STATE WERE AVAILABLE TO IT TO FORCE ACTIVITIES INTO RELIGIOUS CHANNELS. NOW, IT WOULD BE TOO MUCH TO EXPECT COMMUNIST STATE TO DO SAME. HUNGARY, HE SAID, ONLY ACCOMPLISHED SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE 30 YEARS AGO, NOT LIKE U.S. WHICH ALREADY HAD LAUNCHED ITSELF IN THAT DIRECTION 200 YEARS AGO. IF CHURCH IS TO BE FREE TO PREACH RELIGION, COMMUNISTS SHOULD BE FREE TO PREACH ATHEISM.

MIKLOS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PROBLEMS AND COMPLAINTS DO OCCUR, AND OPINED THAT THEY ALWAYS WILL. HE ALSO SAID HEKNEW THAT NOT EVERY PARTY SECRETARY OR COUNTY

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OFFICIAL IS EQUALLY ZEALOUS IN STRICTLY ENFORCING FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION. ON OTHER HAND, HE ASSERTED STRONGLY THAT HIS OFFICE WAS COMMITTED TO INVESTIGATING EVERY COMPLAINT THAT REACHES IT AND TAKING REMEDIAL ACTION WHENEVER INDICATED.

WITH REGARD TO TRAINING OF PRIESTS, MIKLOS SAID THERE WERE QUITE A FEW BEING TRAINED, BUT NOT AS MANY AS CHURCH WOULD LIKE. THIS, ACCORDING TO MIKLOS, WAS NOT DUE TO LACK OF OPPORTUNITY BUT INTEREST, AGAIN A WORLDWIDE PROBLEM. GOH, MIKLOS SAID, SUPPORTS SEMINARIES TOO; IT HAD JUST RECENTLY APPROVED A MULTI-MILLION FORINT GRANT FOR MODERNIZATION OF THEIR HEATING SYSTEMS.

AS FOR SIX CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS, AGAIN MIKLOS SAID THAT IF MORE PEOPLE DID NOT ATTEND THEM (BEYOND THEIR ACTUAL ENROLLMENT OF OVER 3,000) IT WAS ALSO DUE TO LACK OF GREATER INTEREST. CHURCH FEELS THAT HIGH COSTS MAY BE ANOTHER FACTOR AND CARDINAL LEKAI RECENTLY PROPOSED

TO OFFICE OF CHURCH-STATE AFFAIRS THAT CHURCHES SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO TAKE UP COLLECTIONS ESPECIALLY FOR SCHOLARSHIP MONEY FOR CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS, SO THAT RURAL CHILDREN COULD STAY IN DORMITORIES FOR FREE, JUST LIKE THEY CAN IN STATE SCHOOLS. THIS WAS APPROVED, AND FIRST SUCH COLLECTION WAS TAKEN UP LAST SUNDAY.

5. VATICAN AND CROWN OF ST. STEPHEN:

AT ONE POINT IN CONVERSATION MIKLOS MENTIONED THAT IN 1963 SOMEONE IN GH HAD THOUGHT IT A GOOD IDEA TO INQUIRE OF VATICAN WHETHER IT COULD BE HELPFUL IN GOH'S EFFORTS TO RECOVER CROWN. AFTER SOME DELAY VATICAN REPLIED (MIKLOS SAID PRESUMABLY RESPONSE CAME FROM U.S.) THAT IT VIEWED THE CROWN AS A HUNGARIAN NATIONAL TREASURE, AND NOT AN ARTICLE OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM OR SIGNIFICANCE. SINCE THAT TIME IN ITS CONTACTS AT VARIOUS LEVELS VATICAN REPRESENTATIVES HAVE MADE NO FURTHER MENTION OF THE CROWN.

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6. COMMENT:

MIKLOS WAS VERY FRIENDLY, TALKATIVE AND EXPANSIVE. HE GAVE IMPRESSION OF FRANKNESS AND OPENNESS THROUGHOUT THE TALK. HE IS OBVIOUSLY A SKILLED AND EXPERIENCED OFFICIAL WHO HAS BEEN IN HIS JOB FOR A LONG TIME AND KNOWS HOW TO SPEAK EFFECTIVELY TO WESTERNERS. HE IS ARTICULATE AND ADDICTED TO BEING PERSUASIVE WITH HIS WESTERN INTERLOCUTORS.

MIKLOS OBVIOUSLY WAS NOT UNAWARE OF IMPACT VISITS OF HUNGARIAN RELIGIOUS FIGURES HAVE HAD ON U.S. AS WELL AS IMPORTANCE THEY HAVE FOR HUNGARY IN PROVIDING GOOD IMAGE OF THIS COUNTRY IN U.S. HE WAS CAREFUL IN HIS HANDLING OF QUESTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH VATICAN. WE GOT IMPRESSION GOH NOT INTERESTED IN PUSHING FOR FORMAL ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AT THIS TIME. PRESUMABLY, HIS REFERENCE TO TIME NOT BEING RIPE HAS TO DO WITH PROBLEMS WITH THE SOVIETS. QUITE OBVIOUSLY ALSO, WHILE MIKLOS REGARDED QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS SOLVED IN HUNGARY, CHURCH LEADERS DO NOT AND, AS TIME PASSES, THIS IS LIKELY TO BECOME SHARPER ISSUE BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE AUTHORITIES. WHILE IT MAY BE WELL FOR MIKLOS TO ARGUE ABOUT SECULARIZATION OF LIFE ACCOUNTING FOR LACK OF HUNGARIAN YOUTH INTEREST IN RELIGION, WE SEE SOME SIGNS THAT YOUTH, DISENCHANTED WITH SOCIALISM AS A SYSTEM, ARE LOOKING MORE TO RELIGION FOR INSPIRATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE. CERTAINLY, IT CAN BE SAID, SOCIALISM HOLDS NO GREAT FASCINATION FOR HUNGARIAN YOUTH. WHAT MEMBERS THERE

ARE IN YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS ARE LARGELY MOTIVATED BY
CAREER CONSIDERATIONS.

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